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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate students are routinely assigned a long research paper--surely the most complex intellectual skill ever expected from them--and expected to write it with a minimum of teacher and library interference and with thorough faith in the end product. More than anything else, the traditional approach to directing research papers focused on research paraphernalia such as notecards, plagiarism, footnotes, etc., rather than on the research process. A process approach to research offers the following personal and practical benefits: (1) the student is in charge of his or her ideas; (2) the student is led through a process, not given a summons for a product; (3) a whole portfolio of writing--and therefore intellectual exploration--occurs; (4) librarians are used for their expertise--and the teacher as researcher and writer also serves as a resource for students; and (5) students learn not just a subject, but a way, a means, of synthesizing ideas. (SAM)

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THEORY INTO PRACTICE: PERSONAL VOICE, PROCESS, AND PORTFOLIO

The Senior Seminar that year was successful in terms of the goals we had set for ourselves: most students turned in solid, original papers, although there was one failing paper, and one student followed what had to be the letter rather than the spirit of the law as he submitted--and requested that we read--numerous drafts with mere word changes. He never did "get it." At the other end of the spectrum, two students presented papers at a student writing seminar held at St. Francis College that spring. One of our students won the annual Excellence in Writing Award for her paper on *Frankenstein* and, in our judgment, that paper was potentially publishable (and, in fact she is now in graduate school in Arizona and is re-doing the paper for publication in her course in Romantics).

In general we thought that middle level students were helped most by our process technique, and several of them expressed gratitude at the end of the course for having finally received information about what research was really like; unfortunately, this experience came at the end, not the beginning, of their undergraduate experience.

When we asked for student evaluation of the course, we found that the students who considered themselves most helped were the ones, not coincidentally, expressed anxiety about the research process, were open to instruction, and willingly wrote, talked and rewrote as we asked. Their comments included observesations that writing was "less laborious" because of the techniques and that "progressive steps toward the paper were helpful." One said "the help with our research papers was absolutely terrific. I couldn't ask for a better way of preparing and organizing" and one opined "I felt that even though I was an English major and know how to write papers, that this one taught me about the process of writing." The students least open to our

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techniques had complaints, of course. The student mentioned earlier who never did "get it" "would have liked more teacher input" and "still needs to learn to take criticism from two people at once."

That course is now over, but the lessons linger, for all of us. I continue to assign research papers, but because of our experiment, I have radically transformed that assignment. I want today briefly to sketch how this approach continues to work for me from the Freshman level research course to my graduate seminars. Especially in the latter do we see a problem, by the way. Undergraduate students are routinely assigned a long research paper--surely the most complex intellectual skill we ever expect from them--with a minimum of teacher and library interference and a thorough faith in the end product. So also do students when they reach graduate school receive little or no help in preparing what is normally the single evaluation measure for an advanced course. Patricia Sullivan in a recent article surveyed graduate courses and concluded that "under the current pedagogical model, the completed assignment is privileged over its production, the written product over the writing process" (286). Graduate professors hardly deign to mention the research process because "students already know how to do it" and the "text based" product is "a solitary act rather than a social or collaborative experience" (288).

My conversion about what we are calling "sequenced research" --meaning research as process--was awhile in coming, but it is now an article of faith. I have been an English teacher for some quarter of a century, much of that time as a migrant worker in the fields of academe (in part time jobs, by the way, where the fundamental research skills that both graduate and undergraduate instructors so much depend upon are taught). I had long observed the basic impossible list of what research should be about: More than anything else, students remember and teachers assign, research <u>paraphernalia</u>, not the research process. You know the list:

notecards, preferably 3 X 5

plagiarism, lectures about

topics, assigned by teacher

footnotes, long lectures on

library tours, at beginning of term

pages, a certain and large number and

sources, a certain and equally large number

This list does not reflect the research process as I know it, as a scholar. Not only that: it is irrelevant in our modern technological age. Students by the year 2000 might well be doing their searches on computer bulletin boards rather than 3 X 5 cards; possibly that will cause yet a new set of problems that we should be addressing. How do we prepare our students for their very real future? And how also do I as a responsible teacher give my students some sense of the joy and the job and the challenge of real research as I know it?

Colleagues such as Judith and Katie, have helped by having the same questions. And students have helped. I began to understand the problem a bit better from the long report I have always assigned in the Business Writing course both at St. Xavier and at the large urban university where I taught before. For years I have had the common sense to require that the long report come out of the students' own work or life experience. From rough experimentation in those business courses, as well as frehsman writing courses,senior seminar,and , yes, now graduate courses I have come up with a practical guide to the research process. I use no textbook having to do with research. Having myself logged hundreds of scholarly footnotes, I trust that I can tell students all that they need to know about format. The textbooks on the market are useful for little else than mechanics in my experience. Let me briefly outline how the research experience goes for me.

First of all, it is critical to give the students the opportunity to develop personal research, that which is inside their heads, that which they already know. This is how I work as a scholar and this is how process writing works. In my business courses the way I would teach this kind of respect for one's own knowledge might to begin with a process analysis assignment: for example, please write out for me a process that you know very well,a memo, perhaps, that you leave for a co-wor'‹er when you go on vacation. On the other hand, in my course on gender analysis Honors English 152, I ask students to work in groups to develop charts that show how gender and sex differ at every age and stage in human development. They learn to network, to share information, and to discover that they carry around a great deal of knowledge as well. In the graduate course, this step comes from response papers where I ask students to write an informal, ungraded paper each week on some aspect of the material we are reading: "Who is pursuer and who is pursued in the novel *Caleb Williams* ?" is an example of a response paper.

After about 1/3 of the course is over, I ask students to do primary research: when students think of research they think"Library. Eek!" But,in fact, in business writing, it is rarely the case that secondary research in libraries is all that you do. Nearly all projects necessitate interviewing, observation, scanning company files. My assignment for business students is to do an interview--I often ask them to interview a person who is holding a job they would like to hold in five years to soften them up for the value of interviewing. For literature classes I ask often that students interview a person they have determined to possess information they would like to have. Graduate courses have no easy equivalent, but I recommend, for example, a talk with an expert in a field in which they are interested--if they would like to do a feminist approach, it would be well to talk to a feminist critic, and if they are interested in Edgar Allen Poe's relation to William Godwin, it would behoove the student to talk to an

American Literature specialist.

Finally,about one half of the way through the course, we begin on our secondary research. My first assignment is limited to a sentence or even a word or two: Please tell me what you would like to work on for your long research paper. I follow that with an assignment for a paragraph a week later. Usually at that point I schedule individual conferences and require students to come see me with a longer proposal of perhaps two paragraphs and usually a prospective research plan--i.e. how do you plan to find this information?

In freshman research writing classes at this point I ask students to write about how they feel about the research process. I usually use a minute essay for this. This semester I have given them an opportunity to talk about what works for them in terms of note-taking. Often they have been through this procedure with a very hidebound system, and the more exacting and apprehensive student will often need to keep to a certain system, be it notecards or pieces of notebook paper or whatever. As a class we listen to all approaches. I list those approaches on the board. I do not need to ask them to adopt my model and destroy what has worked for them in the past. I allow them to use whatever works, as long as I am persuaded that they are taking notes.

At this point I give the proposals and the revelations about library anxiety to Judith Arnold who examines the proposals, determines each student's sense of security about research, then customizes the research options for each person in neat red pen at the bottom of each proposal. I cannot tell you what it means to students to learn that a librarian is a real person and, in Judith's case, a helpful and personable person: odd as it may sound, many undergraduates are afraid of librarians.

Finally we are ready for the library instruction, which at last they desire. From my point of view, the advantage of leaving it until the last bit is that the students are ready for the knowledge, and for me as a professional, it is a matter of handing it over

to another expert. Judith is often able, for example, to provide specialized indices that I do not even know about as well as recondite sources that only a librarian could search out. I do not have to try to make it my business to know all this, and that is very freeing to me. I wonder why we always have to feel that we are the experts.

What is the evidence that they are working all the while? For to be realistic, we all need to know that. I have tried research journals. This semester I am providing my freshman students with a research log which I will routinely be collecting both to keep them on task and to reassure myself that they are in the library. I require a computer print-out of all the books or articles on their subject, and I ask for annotated bibliographies. I just want to see that they are in the library working; these techniques all help. I also give a period of time at the beginning of class to discuss how it is going. Students often give valuable feedback to each other.

Next, I plan time for rough draft workshops in which both peer groups and I take part in. The helpfulness of this cannot be underlined enough. As Katie has stated, this is an opportunity for students to realize that they are not just performing for a teacher. In the team-taught Senior Seminar we provided a critique sheet and guide so that the reader's remarks would be standardized after a fashion, and each paper was read by both a student and an instructor. After the draft session, we were available for conferences, and most students gratefully availed themselves of the opportunity.

Finally, I have always required in my business classes and my graduate classes--and propose finally to require in all my classes an oral presentation of findings. This is an important element in the Business Writing class because I want them to be able to communicate their findings to their peers in the real world of marketing or banking. But I also schedule it in the freshman and graduate courses as well because I think that the same principles apply: this is rhetoric in its freshest yet most original meaning--sharing your ideas with others.

Finally, when the time comes for grading and evaluation, I find myself much more comfortable. I have looked at work for 15 weeks; I have watched, listened to, and talked to students involved in a topic of their choice. Judging the final product becomes much easier because I have been warm on the trail for so long. I must report that at our school we are only just getting started in portfolios, and we have as yet no standardized portfolio assessment program, though we will have next fall. Because I have been working closely with the Writing Through the Disciplines program at our school, however,I am convinced of the usefulness of this approach, and absent an actual policy, I have begun to work with portfolios in my freshman level writing course. When they entered, I asked for an accumulation of their best writing complete with all the pre-writing examples; because we are all working on a process model, I was able to acquire this from most students. I might add that the writing samples did not have to come from English courses--I simply asked them to submit what they thought was their best work. So at a point about five weeks into the semester I looked at their portfolios of their "best work" and read it through, made notes on, and shared in individual conferences the information about the kinds of skills I saw in the portfolios that would serve them well in the research project. If a student had done interviews for sociology, for example, (and this actually happened), I could point out that this kind of experience and skill was transferable if the student wanted to do an interview for this paper. In this class all the student writing for all the term will go into the same portfolio, and I am of course urging them to keep the portfolios for future use, both before graduation and after.

I want also to report that I have had only one plagiarized paper in three years of using this process in class after class: actually I was able to tell that that particular case was coming, because that student did not leave the "paper trail" that I require of my students. I tell students about plagiarism, but I as a teacher have been with the

students throughout the process so that I know very keenly at every step what the student is doing. If I suspect plagiarism, I nail down the evidence. Here Judith Arnold is again helpful to me; she and I gathered the hard evidence necessary in the plagiarism case that I mentioned above.

I am thinking of problems, of rejoinders to what I have had to say, and I think that an obvious one is time. I am not sure how to answer that. Ours is a small school, and the demands are great; the usual load is four courses a semester. And yet I would say that this is all time-saving, despite its sounding so time-consuming, chiefly because I know that what students are learning.

My paper has been focused on the personal, the practical, rather than the theoretical, and I have tried to summarize my modus operandi for this approach to research at every level I teach. But let me summarize why I am wed to the process approach to research by listing what I think are its merits:

1. the student is in charge of his or her ideas;
2. the student is led through a process, not given a summons for a product;
3. a whole portfolio of writing--and therefore intellectual exploration--occurs;
4. librarians are used for their expertise--and I am used for mine as a researcher and writer;
5. students learn not just a subject, but a way, a means, of synthesizing ideas. And that is the highest form of learning. That is true scholarly research as I understand it.

Works Cited

Sullivan, Patricia A. "Writing in the Graduate Curriculum: Literary Criticism as Composition." *Journal of Advanced Composition* , Fall 1991: 283-99.